

Academic Language Socialization in High School Writing Conferences

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Abstract: This study examines multilingual high school writers' individual talk with their teachers in two advanced English language development classes to observe how such talk shapes linguistically diverse adolescents' writing. Addressing adolescent writers' language socialization through microethnographic discourse analysis, the author argues that teachers' oral responses during writing conferences can either scaffold or deter students' socialization into valued ways of using academic language for school writing. She suggests what forms of oral response provide scaffolding and what forms might limit multilingual adolescent learners' academic literacy. Constructive interactions engaged students in dialogue about their writing, and students included content or phrasing from the interaction in their texts. Unhelpful interactions failed to foster students' language development in observable ways. Although teachers attempted to scaffold ideas and language, they often did not guide students' discovery of appropriate forms or points. These interactions represent restrictive academic language socialization: while some students did create academic texts, they learned little about academic language use.

Keywords: adolescent literacy, language socialization, scaffolding, second language writing

Résumé : Peu de recherches ont été faites à ce jour sur la façon dont les échanges verbaux avec les enseignants influencent l'écriture d'adolescents provenant de milieux linguistiques diversifiés. Cette étude s'intéresse aux conversations particulières entre des élèves multilingues du secondaire et leur enseignant, dans deux cours d'anglais avancé où les élèves doivent écrire. Abordant la socialisation linguistique des écrivains adolescents au moyen d'une analyse du discours microethnographique, je défends l'idée que les réactions verbales des enseignants pendant les ateliers d'écriture peuvent soit étayer les efforts de socialisation des étudiants et les convertir en moyens privilégiés d'employer la langue intellectuelle dans leurs rédactions scolaires, soit les décourager. Je détermine les formes de réaction orale qui sont constructives et celles qui peuvent limiter le développement de la littératie académique chez les apprenants adolescents multilingues. Les interactions constructives sont celles qui engagent les étudiants dans un dialogue au sujet de leur activité d'écriture, et à la suite desquelles ils reprennent dans leurs textes des formulations ou du contenu tirés de l'interaction. Les interactions inutiles sont celles qui ne réussissent pas à faire avancer le développement linguistique des étudiants de façon observable. Bien que les enseignants aient

tenté de construire les idées et la langue, souvent ils ne guidaient pas la découverte par les étudiants des formes ou des arguments appropriés. Ces interactions sont représentatives d'une socialisation restreinte sur le plan du langage intellectuel : même si certains étudiants sont parvenus à rédiger des textes conceptuels, ils n'ont pas appris grand-chose au sujet de l'emploi du langage intellectuel.

Mots-clés : écriture en langue seconde, littératie chez les adolescents, étayage, socialisation linguistique

In secondary school, multilingual students encounter new genres and ways of using language specific to school writing. Their teachers must not only teach the language structures appropriate to disciplinary norms, but also guide students' understanding of how language is used in representing concepts to various audiences (Lea & Street, 2006). While learning to write in academic contexts, students are socialized into ways of using language valued in the classroom culture (Duff, 2010).

This study examines multilingual¹ high school writers' talk with their teachers in two advanced English language development classes in California. In this article, I argue that teachers' oral responses during writing conferences can either scaffold students' socialization into or deter them from valued ways of using academic language for school writing. I describe forms of interaction that provide scaffolding and forms that limit multilingual adolescent learners' academic literacy.

Writing for academic purposes involves marshalling linguistic resources and understanding ideological ways of using language (Lea & Street, 2006). Rather than following uniform rules, academic language varies in form depending on its functions. As participants explore abstract concepts, their talk may resemble everyday conversation, with discourse features of informal oral interaction (Gibbons, 2009). Because they are doing academic work, this talk counts as academic language; Bunch (2006) labels it the *language of ideas*. In formal presentation of ideas, however, academic language requires precision and awareness of disciplinary expectations (Schleppegrell, 2004)—the *language of display* (Bunch, 2006). In the language of display, speakers and writers attend carefully to lexical choices, sentence structure, and explicit explanation. For example, students' reflective journals may include non-standard features, incomplete sentences, or code-switching, but their final reports incorporate register-appropriate vocabulary and standard grammatical structures. Learning to use the language of display in writing for academic purposes is a process of socialization through which students learn both what they should create and how to act as members of an academic community (Duff, 2010; Huang, 2004).

Studying response to writing through a language socialization lens

Writing conferences and oral feedback

Writing conferences—oral feedback that teachers give students during one-on-one conversations about the students' texts—have received much research attention. Conducted primarily at the university level, research on second language writing conferences has mainly considered grammar development and error correction (such as [Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994](#); [Koshik, 2002](#)). A few studies have examined how interactions scaffold students' development of broader writing competencies ([Ewert, 2009](#); [Goldstein & Conrad, 1990](#); [Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997](#); [Weissberg, 2006](#)). Although the present study focuses on younger writers, research with college-age students reveals essential characteristics of second language writing conferences.

Language learners are supported during conferences through scaffolded interaction with their teachers. [Ewert \(2009\)](#) defines *scaffolding* as "tactics in the talk provided by a more proficient interlocutor when assisting a less proficient learner in accomplishing a task or solving a problem which he or she could not accomplish alone" (p. 252). Appropriate scaffolding from teachers helps student writers develop greater confidence and capacity in their writing ([Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994](#); [Ewert, 2009](#); [Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997](#)). Key features of scaffolding in conferences include teachers' abilities to gain and maintain learner interest, to mark key features of the text, and to reduce the complexity of requests ([Ewert, 2009](#)). Tutorial scaffolding ranges from tutors identifying and correcting errors to students doing so by themselves, building toward greater learner autonomy ([Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994](#)). Teachers may use a process [Koshik \(2002\)](#) termed *Designedly Incomplete Utterances* (DIU), reading a student's text aloud and pausing to create fill-in-the-blank items where an error occurred, expecting the student to complete the sentence.

Learners can negotiate meaning and language by asking clarification questions and seeking confirmation of their understanding ([Ewert, 2009](#)). Students who negotiate with teachers over phrasing or ideas revise their texts more than do students who passively accept teacher suggestions ([Goldstein & Conrad, 1990](#)). Academically stronger and linguistically more proficient students negotiate more during conferences ([Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997](#)). Scaffolding succeeds when participants mutually orient to the same features of the text (points needing further development), the student then proposes new language, and the teacher provides feedback on the proposed text ([Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994](#); [Young & Miller, 2004](#)).

Second language writers may, however, be unfamiliar with expectations for interaction in writing conferences. Culturally, students may be uncomfortable meeting one-on-one with teachers (Ferris, 2003), asking them questions (Hyland, 2003), or speaking authoritatively about their writing (Black, 1998). Language learners may also have difficulty processing oral language, reducing their ability to participate actively in the conference or to remember the ideas for incorporation into their writing (Ferris, 2003; Leki, 1992). They may be unfamiliar with DIUs and unaware that they should complete the teacher's sentence (Koshik, 2002). Moreover, second language writers may not ask for clarification out of embarrassment or concern for disrespecting the teacher (Ferris, 2003; Leki, 1992). Furthermore, scaffolding may not work for second language writers if teachers cannot adapt their practices to provide support at each student's linguistic or academic level (Ewert, 2009).

Only a few studies have addressed writing conferences at the high school level, and none have taken a language socialization approach. Although there have been some studies of writing conferences in primary school classrooms (such as Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1989), only Freedman, Delp, and Crawford (2005), Enright (Enright, 2011; Enright Villalva, 2006), and Sperling (1991a, 1991b) have examined conferences with secondary school students. These researchers found some benefits to conferences, such as successful negotiation of intended meaning (Sperling, 1991b) and opportunities to individualize instruction (Freedman et al., 2005), but also drawbacks related to teachers' control over the interaction and focus (Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1989) or students' resistance (Sperling, 1991a). Enright (Enright, 2011; Enright Villalva, 2006) noted that teachers focused conferences with multilingual writers on curricular assessment criteria rather than on individual students' linguistic or literacy needs. For example, although a student's essay demonstrated conceptual problems, the teacher focused conferences on organization, a core criterion on the official rubric (Enright Villalva, 2006).

Studies of extended one-on-one conferences in high schools are rare, however. Three studies have noted a related phenomenon during whole-class writing workshop sessions: quick check-ins during which teachers walk around the room and talk briefly with individual students about their writing. No research has compared the effectiveness of the two forms of conferences. Freedman et al. (2005) and Sperling (1991b) observed teachers conducting successful sessions as brief as a minute each. These quick check-ins are common in secondary school classrooms when there are too many students and too little time for teachers to hold extended conferences with all students (Sperling, 1991b). Sperling (1991b) noted a teacher who did not set a schedule for

meeting with individual students, but rather responded to individual need. Furthermore, by talking frequently with all his students, the teacher entered each conversation knowing where the student needed help. This teacher and the teacher in [Freedman et al. \(2005\)](#) saw these quick conferences as manageable scaffolding within the time constraints of a typical high school classroom. In the only study to observe this phenomenon with multilingual high school students, [Kibler \(2010, 2011\)](#) found that teacher check-ins supported multilingual writers through multiple forms of scaffolding talk, such as varying levels of questioning, rephrasing students' contributions into academic register, and allowing peer use of students' first languages to negotiate ideas. [Kibler \(2011\)](#) also observed, however, that other teacher practices, such as providing models and withholding approval of proposed revisions, limited students' learning of academic language.

Taken together, the literature on second language conferencing and quick check-ins suggests that one-on-one talk with a teacher has strong potential to assist novice writers' learning. Little research, however, has focused on how interaction during quick check-ins in high school classes scaffolds multilingual students' academic language development. The present study analyzes such brief conferences to identify ways that teacher-student interactions support or deter multilingual adolescent writers' academic language socialization.

Oral feedback as language socialization

Writing conferences are language socialization events where "teachers and students (re)negotiate a specific 'language' of 'writing'" ([Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997](#), p. 52). Teacher feedback socializes students into ways of using language valued in the classroom ([Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994](#)). Oral language fosters the social production of writing, as teachers and students discuss writing and provide feedback on texts ([Weissberg, 2005](#)). As experts who model and guide students' academic language development, teachers serve as socializing agents in the classroom ([Morita & Kobayashi, 2008](#)). Students learn how to use academic language for interaction within the culture of the classroom.

Language socialization in general theorizes that people not only learn how to *use* language, but also learn *through* language to become full participants in a culture ([Ochs & Schieffelin, 2008](#)). Because academic discourse is not just language, but also ways of using that language in social interactions in academic settings, learners are socialized into both the pragmatics and the ideologies of language use ([Duff, 2010](#)). Academic language socialization involves, in part, learning discipline-specific content through language and learning the language used in a particular discipline ([Duff, 2010](#); [Huang, 2004](#)). Not only must

students learn the content of disciplines they are studying, but to succeed academically they must also learn how to use language appropriately. This challenge is greater for students whose home language practices are not congruent with those used at school (Gibbons, 2006).

While language socialization requires both learning language and learning through language (Duff, 2010), as the following studies of classroom discourse show, some multilingual adolescents are denied opportunities to learn the language they need to express their understanding of content or to participate fully in the classroom community. School language practices can socialize students into reductive forms of language use and interaction that limit rather than extend their opportunities to interact in meaningful ways in the classroom (Enright, Torres-Torretti, & Carreón, 2012; Talmy, 2008). Furthermore, earlier research at the same high school as the present study found that in classes with many language learners, teachers avoided explicitly teaching the language needed to accomplish academic tasks (Enright & Gilliland, 2011). Instead, driven by limited time and assessment pressures, they either provided nearly complete models for students to copy, assuming students would learn inductively, or expected students to come up with acceptable phrasing independently. Findings showed that students still learning academic language could not utilize teacher models.

Although the above studies demonstrated how high school classroom talk can shape multilingual adolescents' access to the language of schooling, there is scant research on the role of conference talk in students' opportunities to learn academic language needed in writing for school. The present study examines oral interactions between high school teachers and multilingual students during writing workshops in two English Language Development classes to identify features of talk that scaffolded or limited students' language socialization.

The following research questions guided the analyses of the interaction data:

- In what ways did teacher-student interaction scaffold students' ability to take up the language of ideas and the language of display in their writing?
- What does analysis of interaction in one-on-one writing conferences with multilingual adolescents reveal about ways that teacher-student interaction socializes students' academic language?

Methodology

Context

These data are part of an ethnographic, multi-case study of two English Language Development classrooms (Gilliland, 2012). Data

were collected during the 2009–2010 academic year in Willowdale,² a city of about 50,000 people in central California. A comprehensive high school, Willowdale High School (WHS) served 1,503 students in Grades 9 to 12 that year. With a population of 55% Hispanic and 40% White (non-Hispanic) students, including 20% classified as English learners and another 20% considered “Fluent English Proficient,”³ WHS’s demographics were similar to the state-wide average for California high schools (California Department of Education, <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>). As part of an effort to raise standardized test scores for all students, the school district had integrated a series of essays into the Grade 9 English curriculum. These five Benchmark Assignments (BAs), genres tested on the state high school exit exam, were scored on a district-designed rubric.

This analysis focuses on two sections of Transitions to English, a two-period class combining the Grade 9 curriculum (including the five BAs) with that of advanced English Language Development. The course was a bridge between the lower-level English Language Development courses (specifically for students learning English) and mainstream grade-level English Language Arts courses. Mr. Brown’s section had 25 Grade 9 students. Ms. Chou’s section had 16 students in Grades 10, 11, and 12.

Procedure

The primary unit of data collection was audio recordings of individual teacher-student writing talk during writing workshop time. The teachers and focal students wore lapel microphones attached to separate audio recorders, to capture the language of participants as they talked about drafts. Further data collection included observations, semi-structured interviews with both teachers and seven focal students, and documents (including all drafts of student writing, assignment prompts, and supporting worksheets). As a participant observer, I took extensive field notes during class sessions focused on elements of writing, the writing process, or writing assignments. In all, the data analyzed in this paper include audio recordings of nine days (54 hours) of Transitions 9 and nine days (38 hours) of Transitions 10–12.

Analysis

Discourse analysis, used in conjunction with ethnographic methods, can provide evidence for claims about language socialization (Watson-Gegeo & Bronson, 2013). In analysis of data from observations of classroom writing instruction events, I use theoretical tools from the micro-ethnographic approach advocated by Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, and Shuart-Faris (2005) and Gibbons (2006), to identify

macro-structures and patterns in the classroom discourse. I focus analysis on the persuasive essay unit, one of five BA essays in each class. This was the second essay in Ms. Chou's class and the fourth in Mr. Brown's class. The unit typified writing procedures I had observed during the first semester that were repeated throughout the school year. I transcribed the audio recordings, identifying teacher-student interactions focused on writing and language, attempting to capture speakers' exact words, intonation, and rate of speaking (see Appendix for the transcription key).

I coded the data for turn taking, contextualization cues,⁴ and intertextual connections between words or concepts in the teacher-student talk, participant actions, student drafts, and texts written on the whiteboard. Through these intertextual connections, I noted *tracers*⁵ from the teacher-student talk that were taken up in the students' subsequent revisions. Similar to Hanaoka and Izumi (2012), I define *uptake* as the presence of a tracer in both the teacher-student conference and the student's final draft. I also coded deductively for the purposes of quantifying the emphasis and length of the interactions. Each interaction was coded as a single unit for the overall focus (content, language, or structure), the length of the interaction (30 seconds or less, 31–59 seconds, or one minute or longer), and whether the talk was taken up in the students' writing. A few interactions were counted twice in the focus analysis when they covered more than one purpose (such as both content and language). I counted each of these codes, giving partial points to interactions where some parts, but not all, of the teacher's comments were taken up in the student's writing.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the codes, I solicited feedback on my coding procedures from colleagues. I chose not to invite other scholars to participate in the coding process, however, because of the ethnographic nature of the study. As Brice (2005) notes, inter-rater reliability cannot be obtained when the interpretation of discourse data requires additional knowledge of and experience with the study participants and context. While the data analyzed in this article are transcriptions of audio recordings, my analysis and the ultimate interpretation of that analysis were informed by my own experience, having spent a year immersed in the cultures of the two classrooms, as well as by all the other data I had collected (interviews, observations, and documents) for the larger study.

Findings

When talk was taken up in writing

When teacher practices engaged students in dialogue about their writing, their conversations led to uptake—observable inclusion of the

content or phrasing of that dialogue in student texts. In this section I present examples of interactions in which teacher-student talk resulted in observable changes to students' written texts.

Talk influences ideas

Some interactions that influenced students' writing involved developing ideas or refining content. In the following excerpt, Orlando had finished the body paragraphs of his essay arguing in favour of gun ownership and asked Ms. Chou about the introduction, which he had not yet started. She reminded him of a story they had read about a man shot by a stranger:

- 1 Ms. Chou: Orlando, do you remember that thing we read [unint] about gun control?
- 2 Orlando: Yeah.
- 3 Ms. Chou: Or the death penalty? I'm sorry. Remember that one thing we read about the death penalty? Where the lady talked about the fact that her dad got shot?
- 4 Orlando: Yeah? [.5]
- 5 Ms. Chou: Was that kind of interesting? [.6]
- 6 Orlando: Yes, it, yeah, it was.
- 7 Ms. Chou: OK. So that's what you want to do. You want to come up with maybe, a fact, like [2]
- 8 Orlando: Like an imagination. Ooh, I'm way ahead of you, Miss Chou!
- 9 Ms. Chou: Or yeah, you could come up with something imaginary and then go into it.
- 10 Orlando: Like [.5]
- 11 Ms. Chou: You could sa::y, something about [.5] you kno::w, you're writing about the fact that we sho::uld
//be able// to have it,
- 12 Orlando: //Yeah, we should//
- 13 Ms. Chou: So you could write about, something about how, maybe you would feel if a::, somebody came into your house
//and tried to// attack you,
- 14 Orlando: //and yeah//
- 15 Ms. Chou: But you had no way of protecting yourself.
- 16 Orlando: //And if you had like//
- 17 Ms. Chou: //How would you//
- 18 Orlando: And if you had like a gun you could protect yourself and
//nothing// would've happened to you.
- 19 Ms. Chou: //Yeah//
- 20 Orlando: OK.

Ms. Chou's talk engaged Orlando, encouraging him to think of his own contribution to his essay. During the first seven turns, Orlando responded minimally to the teacher's questions. However, Ms. Chou's

suggestion in Turn 7, along with her two-second pause, may have inspired him. He jumped in to show his enthusiasm for (and familiarity with) the concept of “an imagination” to interest readers. Although she may have meant for him to summarize a nonfiction article they had read in class, he recognized the potential of other forms of narrative as an introductory hook. When she accepted his proposal, he seemed unsure how to begin developing a story (Turn 10). Recognizing Orlando’s hesitation, Ms. Chou brainstormed the story he could tell, pausing to give him opportunity to contribute. Beginning to follow her idea, he overlapped her talk with statements of agreement. Finally in Turn 16, he took control of the interaction, not just agreeing with Ms. Chou but adding new ideas that anticipated her question in Turn 17. Ms. Chou stopped to let him finish. In Turn 18, Orlando composed an appropriate logical connection between the imagined story and his thesis, that guns should be more available. Immediately following this conversation, Orlando returned to his seat and wrote down both the story and the logical connection⁶:

A man was at his house and someone rang the door bell a mysterious man was at the door and he took out a gun and shot the old man. If the old man had a gun he could have protect themselves.

Orlando took the idea he had talked about with Ms. Chou and composed a complete narrative illustrating the issue they had discussed. The overlapping speech, beginning with his enthusiastic agreement and building to his independent composition of an appropriate final turn, suggest his active engagement with the language of ideas. Multiple factors enabled this successful interaction, including Orlando’s active participation, his willingness to negotiate the content of his introductory hook, Ms. Chou’s pauses and slower speech to encourage his participation, and her ongoing validation of his suggestions. These factors all signal the participants’ mutual orientation toward each other’s contributions to the interaction. I discuss each factor in more detail following the next example.

Talk influences language

Mr. Brown’s work with Ben illustrates an exchange where the teacher scaffolded a student’s incorporation of the language of display—academic language appropriate to the essay requirements. While filling in a graphic organizer to begin the last paragraph of his essay against environmental pollution, Ben asked Mr. Brown what to do next. The organizer indicated that the final section of the paragraph should provide a counterclaim.

- 1 Ben: Mr. Brown!
- 2 Mr. Brown: Yeah.
- 3 Ben: What about for the conclusion, uh, counterclaim. I forgot what counterclaim //was//
- 4 Mr. Brown: //Yeah,// OK, So, counterclaim is, there, people are gonna disagree with you.
- 5 Ben: Uh huh
- 6 Mr. Brown: And what's their argument? The people who say that pollution is not a big problem, what's THEIR argument. What might THEY say? 'Cause if you said, Hey, Mr. Brown, pollution is a big deal. People should not pollute. And I would say, Pollution's not a big deal BECA::USE
- 7 Ben: This evidence
- 8 Mr. Brown: WHY? What are some, what are some, what might be one of their arguments?
- 9 Ben: Uh.
- 10 Mr. Brown: [to other students] Hey! Gentlemen! [2]
- 11 Ben: That we're doing fine right now and there's nothing wrong with the water we drink? Or something like that? There's nothing wrong?
- 12 Mr. Brown: Sure.
- 13 Ben: Uh, something like that [1] Uh [4] Say [5] I dunno what they would say.
- 14 Mr. Brown: Well, well, what sometimes, like, this, this has more to do with the global warming argue, issue, but you can relate it to pollution?
- 15 Ben: Uh huh
- 16 Mr. Brown: What some people will say is that, Look, you know, the pollution that's happening now is not going to affect me at all, because [1] by the time pollution gets to be so bad? I'll be long gone. I'll be dead.
- 17 Ben: Yeah that's true.
- 18 Mr. Brown: You know what I mean?
- 19 Ben: Yeah
- 20 Mr. Brown: So I don't care, it's not my problem [2] So how could, so if, so people who disaGREE with this opinion will SA::Y [2]
- 21 Ben: I'm gonna be long gone by the //time//
- 22 Mr. Brown: //Yeah//
- 23 Ben: It's already polluted.
- 24 Mr. Brown: Yeah, so I don't care, right?
- 25 Ben: Yeah.

This interaction involved multiple steps, each building Ben's understanding of the counterclaim, initially through the language of ideas. In Turn 4, Mr. Brown set up his approach by defining the counterclaim, asking a question, and composing a sentence starter to answer the question. He modelled what Ben might argue and finished with a DIU (Koshik, 2002) similar to his first sentence starter, but emphasizing *because* as a signal to Ben to finish the sentence. Ben took up

Mr. Brown's offer, first pointing at something in his essay and then, when Mr. Brown probed with more questions, with a logical response. In saying that nothing was wrong (Turn 11), Ben demonstrated that he had thought about the issue and recognized that the opposite of claiming pollution is a problem is to say it is not. Mr. Brown's non-committal "Sure" in Turn 12, however, indicated to Ben he should say something else, which he did, but gave up after several false starts and pauses. In Turn 14, Mr. Brown offered Ben an alternative counter-argument, using the voice of "some people" who disagree. When Ben agreed with him, Mr. Brown created another DIU in Turn 20. Ben finished the DIU by paraphrasing the teacher's earlier statement. Each of Mr. Brown's questions (Turns 6, 8, and 14) reduced the complexity of his request, focusing Ben on the teacher's purpose. After each turn, Mr. Brown paused to let Ben respond. Ben took up the teacher's invitations, trying new ways of phrasing his ideas. These actions indicate the participants' mutual orientation toward each other's contributions to the interaction. The next part of this exchange gave Ben more opportunity to negotiate language.

- 26 Mr. Brown: BUT, how would you convince THE::M that that opinion is wrong?
 27 Ben: Your sons, your
 28 Mr. Brown: There you go.
 29 Ben: Yeah?
 30 Mr. Brown: But this is wrong BECA::USE what?
 31 Ben: 'Cause people would, uh, wait, This is wrong beca::use [1] people um, [1] people will be long gone by then? But. I dunno how to put it.
 32 Mr. Brown: Watch. You had it, you had it. OK? [1] People who disagree with this opinion will sa::y what [2]
 33 Ben: People who disagree with this opinion will sa::y. [1] That. [2] Their s::s
 34 Mr. Brown: Keep on, I'm listening. I'm listening.
 35 Ben: Ah gee. People who disagree with this opinion say. [1] That, they'll be long gone b::y, by the time this happens to them. But
 36 Mr. Brown: All right. [1]
 37 Ben: Though people will be long gone by this, by this time will happen, but, what about their children? or something?

Satisfied that Ben understood the first part of the counterclaim, Mr. Brown transitioned to the second part, the rebuttal, in Turn 26. Here he asked Ben a question but did not provide a sentence starter as he had earlier. Once again, Ben had a ready response, the idea that the children of someone who does not care about the environment will have to deal with the effects of pollution in the future. In Turn 30, having accepted Ben's idea, Mr. Brown provided a new DIU frame for the

rebuttal. Ben took up Mr. Brown's sentence starter but completed it with his original counterargument rather than the rebuttal. He stopped himself, recognizing that he could not accurately phrase the rebuttal he had conceived. In Turn 32, the teacher's "watch" indicated that he would model the move from counterargument to rebuttal. He again provided a DIU sentence starter, but this time phrased it more formally, in the language of display that would be appropriate for the written text. Ben immediately repeated the frame (Turn 33) but struggled to finish it, at this point trying to add the part about "their sons." Mr. Brown encouraged him to continue (Turn 34), and Ben successfully completed the counterargument with his earlier point. With Mr. Brown as a patient listener, Ben then started to compose the rebuttal (Turn 37), phrasing it as a question attached to the first half. The exchange finished with both participants focused on refining Ben's language:

- 38 Mr. Brown: Good. So. There are two pieces to this. OK? [5 second pause while Mr. Brown walks to whiteboard, picks up a pen, and writes each word as he says it] People. Who. [2] Dis-a-gree. Will. Say. [walks back to Ben] And you're gonna finish this by saying that it's not my problem, this pollution is not my problem. By the time pollution gets so out of hand that it's gonna destroy our world, I'll be dead.
- 39 Ben: Yeah.
- 40 Mr. Brown: I don't care. Not my problem to deal with. OK? [walks back to whiteboard and writes] However. [4] They. Are. Wro::ng. [2] Beca::use. [2] And what, how are you gonna finish that sentence?
- 41 Ben: However they are wrong beca::use, their children will still be alive by that time.
- 42 Mr. Brown: Their children, their children's children, THEY'RE the ones that are gonna pay the price.
- 43 Ben: Yeah.
- 44 Mr. Brown: There we go!
- 45 Ben: All right, I got it.
- 46 Mr. Brown: Good job, Bud. [walks away]
- 47 Ben: [starts writing.] People who disagree with this opinion sa::y, [2] say. I. will. Be. Lo::ng. Go::ne. By. The. Time. Pol-lu-tion is. Seriously bad. Ser-i-ous. Bad. [2] However. [4] They are wrong. They. Are. Wro::ng. beca::use. Their. Chil-drens. Children. And. Their. Children's children. [2] Will. Be. Very. Affected by it. [4] By. The pollution. [4] Whoo. My hand hurts!

Mr. Brown's "Good" in Turn 38 indicated approval of Ben's work so far. The teacher then moved to write on the board directly in front of Ben's desk, providing the language of display for starting the initial sentence that he had given orally. He repeated the same argument they had agreed upon earlier and wrote the sentence frame for the

rebuttal, the second half of the counterclaim, on the board (Turn 30). Ben immediately took up the sentence frame and completed it (Turn 41) with a rebuttal that demonstrated carefully planned language of display (Bunch, 2006) rather than the more conversational language of ideas he had used earlier. Mr. Brown approved and complimented his work, leaving Ben to write down the two sentences they had jointly composed. Ben's final essay contained not only these two sentences but also a second rebuttal using the same sentence frame to repeat his reasons from the body of his essay:

People who disagree with this opinion say that I will be long gone by the time pollution is seriously bad however they are wrong because there children and there children will be very affected with the pollution. However they are wrong because pollution is harmful to plants, animals and humans.

The teacher's moves and Ben's responses allowed Ben to understand the concept of counterargument through the language of ideas and (re)produce the language of display in his draft. In contrast with the examples presented later in this article, this exchange represents an unusually successful scaffolding interaction in the data from both Transitions classrooms. With almost five minutes together, both participants developed a shared understanding of the ideas and language. By first discussing the two parts to the counterargument in the more colloquial language of ideas, Mr. Brown helped Ben fit his ideas into the concepts before focusing on the formal presentation of those ideas. While Mr. Brown provided model sentence frames in a DIU manner, leaving a blank at the end of his composed sentence and waiting, Ben took the initiative to compose his own continuations to these frames and to stop Mr. Brown for help with the next step. Ben had a general idea of what to do but was sometimes unsure what to write. He also had a strong sense of how the language of display should sound. This combination of Ben's active engagement and Mr. Brown's scaffolding practices contributed to the overall success of the interaction.

Conditions that support uptake in writing

Multiple behaviours were present in the above interactions and in most teacher-student interactions where talk was taken up in student writing. These moves correspond with the literature on scaffolding and negotiation.

Students were active participants and engaged in discussion. Both Ben and Orlando asked questions, contributed to the conversation, or composed sentences for their essays. This mutual orientation

was sometimes signalled by discursive moves that involved overlapping speech, making the interactions closer to natural out-of-school conversations than to classroom interactions. The students became co-constructors of knowledge with their teachers rather than passive recipients of information.

Students tried out new language or ideas. When teachers suggested or modelled new language, the students responded by trying it out. Sometimes, as with Ben, this process involved back-and-forth negotiation, where the teacher provided feedback as the student tried a new sentence and then revised based on the response. In other situations, the student received immediate confirmation of an acceptable sentence. This practice resembles the *negotiation* that Ewert (2009) called essential to learning from scaffolded interactions. When both parties worked to clarify their intentions, students were better able to represent what they had discussed in their writing.

Students wrote down new learning. When students had time during or immediately following the interaction to write down the new words or ideas that they had negotiated during the interaction, their texts showed more consistent uptake of conference talk. This benefit may be due to the students' not having to remember the concepts or language for long. In the examples above, Ben and Orlando both tried out their ideas during their interactions with their teachers and began writing when the teacher left.

Teachers paused to let students talk or ask questions. Closely connected to student behaviours were teacher actions that allowed students to participate actively. In the interactions described above, as in other situations of successful uptake, the teachers stopped talking and allowed the students to think of responses, try out new language, or ask clarifying questions (Gibbons, 2009). This practice gave students opportunities to negotiate their understanding of new ideas and language.

Teachers validated students' correct or on-track responses. Teacher responses to student utterances supported their development of academic language. Through verbal and paralinguistic contributions, the teachers indicated to students when they were on track or had found appropriate phrasing or ideas. Similarly, teacher scaffolding supported transformation of incorrect language use in ways that did not discourage students' initiative.

Teachers scaffolded students' development of language and ideas. In the interactions that led to uptake of ideas or language in students' written text, the teachers used practices that have been observed in scaffolding interactions, including identifying locations for revision (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994), creating designedly incomplete

Table 1: Length of interactions

	Number that led to uptake	Number that led to no uptake	Total number of interactions	% uptake
Long	16.5	16.5	33	50
Mid-length	3	2	5	60
Short	17	12	29	59
Total	36.5	30.5	67	

Note. Long interactions were one minute or longer; mid-length interactions lasted 31–59 seconds; and short interactions were 30 seconds or less.

utterances (Koshik, 2002), and reducing the complexity of requests (Ewert, 2009). The teachers modelled language orally (Mr. Brown also provided written models) such that students could not only transcribe the words but also check their comprehension of the words in the models. Each practice allowed students to create text using language in more sophisticated ways than they could have done alone.

While these behaviours are not groundbreaking discoveries, they do illustrate known best practices for supporting multilingual students’ learning to write (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Ewert, 2009; Gibbons, 2009; Kibler, 2011). The above factors were present in most interactions where teacher-student talk was taken up in students’ writing. More than half the successful interactions were brief, with 20 of 36 lasting less than one minute. In these quick check-ins, teachers employed just one or two of the practices listed above. Table 1 summarizes the number of interactions of various lengths and divides them into those that led to some form of uptake and those that did not.

Although the length of the interactions was not a factor in successful uptake, the focus of the check-ins did make a difference. Three quarters of the sessions that focused on ideas (16 of 22) resulted in uptake, whereas only 40% (16 of 39) of those focused on language did, even though in many language-focused interactions, the teachers dictated sentences students could have transcribed verbatim. Table 2

Table 2: Focus of interactions

	Number that led to uptake	Number that led to no uptake	Total number of interactions	% uptake
Content	16.5	5.5	22	75
Language	15.5	23.5	39	40
Essay structure	5	5	10	50
Total	37	34		

Note. Some interactions were counted twice when they included discussion of more than one focus.

summarizes the focus of each interaction, similarly divided between those that led to some form of uptake and those that did not.

Unlike the interactions described in the previous section, many other interactions did not lead to constructive uptake in writing. I explore these conversations in the next section.

When talk was not taken up in writing

In the interactions where teacher talk did not transfer into students' writing, the teachers sometimes attempted to scaffold ideas and language, but did not guide students to collaborative discovery of appropriate forms or points. In longer unsuccessful interactions, the teachers often talked extensively without pausing to check for student comprehension. Because of this singular focus, I organize this section by the situations in which uptake did not occur.

Students did not understand but remained silent

In analyzing focal students' interactions with the teachers, I noted repeated incidents in which students would ask a question, receive a quick response, and then ask an identical question a few minutes later. Students also accepted teacher directives politely but passively. For example, while working on an essay in support of hybrid cars, Onasis raised his hand, asking Mr. Brown to confirm the viability of what he had written on his graphic organizer:

- 1 Onasis: Can this be my background?
- 2 Mr. Brown: 'Kay, good, now um, you also wanna talk about that this is a, this is sort of a new technology. These vehicles have only been around for like 10 years, and part of that is because people recognize that we are running out of fuel, so they are trying to find alternative vehicles to help conserve.
- 3 Onasis Ah.
- 4 Mr. Brown OK?
- 5 Onasis Mm. [Mr. Brown walks away]

While Mr. Brown did approve Onasis's text, the teacher then provided a list of his own ideas for what else the boy should have in his essay. Onasis's acknowledgement could indicate either comprehension or merely polite backchannelling. Indeed, a few minutes later, he groaned in frustration and asked for help on the same point. From their responses, it is difficult to tell how much the students understood the teachers' talk and how much was politeness. The teachers may have assumed students comprehended but did not provide opportunities for the students to demonstrate their understanding.

In the only direct example in my data of a student's acknowledging that she did not understand the teachers' talk, one day Mercedes asked student teacher Mr. Krause how to write the conclusion sentence of a body paragraph. Over the course of five minutes, he instead detailed what to do with the conclusion paragraph and left without checking for comprehension. When he left, she told her friend in Spanish, "*No le entendí al maestro*" [I didn't understand the teacher]. Mercedes immediately asked Mr. Brown for help with the same issue. Speaking quickly, he composed a concluding sentence, gave her directions, and walked away. Mercedes again told her friend, "*Ay, no entiendo ningún de los maestros*" [I don't understand either of the teachers]. It is unclear from the data if she meant she did not understand the words the teachers were using or did not understand what they wanted her to do. Both teachers spoke rapidly and did not check for comprehension, possibly indicating their belief that Mercedes could follow their explanations.

Teacher did not listen to students' ideas

Both teachers interrupted students in the middle of questions with responses that ignored student concerns. Ivan took an outline of his essay on illegal drugs to Ms. Chou for feedback. She was talking with her teaching assistant, a Grade 12 student, about a topic unrelated to the Transitions class.

- 1 Ivan Miss Chou?
- 2 [5 seconds while Ms. Chou continues conversation with TA and walks toward Ivan]
- 3 Ivan What about this one? "People take drugs for many reasons, thinking that they will help in //help in their" //
- 4 Ms. Chou //OK, how does that// support that? [2]
- 5 Ivan So it has to [1]
- 6 Ms. Chou EVERYthing has to support that statement. [Ms. Chou walks away] That's why you write the thesis first.

Ivan began his request by reading a candidate sentence for his essay. Ms. Chou interrupted his reading, asking a question intended to prompt his thinking. However, evidence indicates that her response did not help Ivan. He had been on the point of talking about an idea for his essay, but Ms. Chou cut him off with a nonspecific question, waited until he began to explain his understanding of her directions, and then repeated her vague directions. Ivan's pause in Turn 5 indicates that he was unable to verbalize an understanding of what to do. Ms. Chou turned away in the middle of her last sentence without checking if he had understood, resuming her conversation with the

TA. Two minutes later, Ivan asked Ms. Chou for help with the same point, producing another sentence that did not meet her approval. It is unclear upon analysis why she turned away, as no other students were asking for help. The data do not indicate that this particular day was any different from other days in the class, nor that time was a factor in her move to end the interaction. Nevertheless, Ms. Chou's response contributed to a culture in her classroom where students could not consistently expect the teacher to either attend to their concerns or wait to see if they understood instructions.

Teacher modelled but did not cue students into thinking

In a recurring practice, the teachers modelled sentences that could fit students' texts without explaining or allowing students time to transcribe the model. They spoke quickly and left without checking for comprehension, as the following example illustrates.

- 1 Mercedes I need help.
- 2 Mr. Brown 'Kay?
- 3 Mercedes With this part. [12 seconds pause while Mr. Brown reads Mercedes's paragraph]
- 4 Mr. Brown 'Kay now how does this support your reason?
- 5 Mercedes What? [1]
- 6 Mr. Brown [reads from Mercedes's paper quickly] "[unint] gang members commit serious crimes." So what you wanna say is like, If we, if we, you know, if people weren't joining gangs, there would be less people committing violent crimes.
- 7 Mercedes And that's there
- 8 Mr. Brown There you go.
- 9 Mercedes Oh.
- 10 Mr. Brown OK.
- 11 Mercedes OK.

Mercedes indicated in Turn 5 that she had not understood Mr. Brown's question. Rather than explain in another way or elicit her ideas on how the quotation supported her reason, Mr. Brown instead orally composed a model of what she could write. He then walked away, leaving Mercedes to write the sentence down or make sense of his suggestion on her own. This form of response could have served as a springboard for a discussion of analysis and interpretation, or of rhetorical choices for connecting specific concepts to general points. Mr. Brown usually left students to make the connections on their own if they could or, if not, to transcribe his statements as best they could remember.

After this interaction, Mercedes wrote this sentence on her graphic organizer following the sentence Mr. Brown had read aloud:

If people would stop with the gangs they would not be alot of gangs or deaths.

The sentence remained unchanged through subsequent drafts. Although it does show that she understood the concept he was talking about, she did not take up the specific language that he had used in his model. Although modelling is a scaffolding technique (Ewert, 2009; Gibbons, 2009), the teachers often modelled sentences just before walking away, leaving the student to transcribe the model and assuming that the student had understood its meaning. The teachers' models also lacked explanations of the moves they made in composing the sentence or the ways in which students could generalize from the example to write that kind of sentence in the future (Schleppegrell, 2004). Learning how to use language independently is a vital aspect of successful language socialization that was often neglected throughout both Transitions classes.

Discussion

In this section I discuss possible explanations for teacher practices and suggestions for teaching and further research. This article explored qualities of interactions framing students' academic language and writing experiences in the two Transitions classrooms. Findings indicated that some teacher-student interactions led students to incorporate phrases from that talk in their writing. Confirming earlier research, in instances of successful interactions the teachers scaffolded students' construction of language through a range of practices that have been identified in the literature on writing conferences, such as designedly incomplete utterances (Koshik, 2002), reduction of complexity of requests (Ewert, 2009), and waiting for students to respond (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). Students also contributed to successful interactions through negotiation, active participation, and writing down ideas. This study suggests that mutual orientation to each other's discourse was key to the success of these interactions, as teachers responded to student concerns and students indicated their comprehension to the teachers.

In contrast, in interactions where teacher-student talk did not influence the students' writing, findings revealed other behaviours: the teachers did not check for comprehension, listen to students' ideas, or cue them into the reasoning for certain language choices, and students remained silent even when they had not understood the teachers' suggestions. Through these interactions, the participants reified a classroom culture where teacher knowledge of language and ideas was passed down to students, whose responsibility was to transcribe the

words as closely as they could. Implicit in this culture were teacher beliefs that students knew what to do with model sentences, understood quickly delivered information, and would ask when they did not follow the teacher's talk.

Reasons for limited uptake in student writing

Nothing in the data indicated a pattern of either teacher fatigue or student behaviours that would orient the teachers to provide scaffolding as they had in the successful interactions noted earlier in this article. Nor was time a factor in the successful uptake of teacher feedback in student writing: both teachers held as many longer check-ins (more than a minute) as shorter ones (less than a minute), and, as noted above, shorter check-ins had as likely a chance of success as longer ones. As [Table 2](#) illustrated, however, successful uptake did correspond with the session focusing on ideas or structure rather than on language. One possible reason for the discrepancy may be the teachers' limited understanding of second language development (see [Gilliland, forthcoming](#), for an analysis of these teachers' beliefs about language and writing). Like the teacher in [Kibler's \(2011\)](#) study, these teachers struggled with "difficult pedagogical choices responding to emergent bilinguals and their needs in these situations" (p. 214). The teachers seemed unable to adapt their scaffolding appropriately to support students with less academic English proficiency.

It is meaningful that the two examples of successful uptake come from focal students born in California. Ben and Orlando were fluent speakers of conversational English, comfortable in the broader school culture. Other students had lived more transnational lives, moving between languages and cultures at least once if not frequently. Immigrant students like Ivan and Mercedes asked for help regularly but did not interrupt the teachers, even when feedback was unclear. Thus it seems that making use of teacher support in the Transitions classes required students to be already familiar with the academic language they had to produce *and* have the confidence to interrupt teachers for clarification.

The teachers had already developed efficient and effective ways of scaffolding mainstream students' academic language and writing. They recognized that students like Ben and Orlando could use the questioning and modelling that worked with their mainstream students. They did not, however, change their response practices for students with language learning needs. Multilingual students often need more or different scaffolding than do native English speakers, including recasts and explicit explanation of reasoning ([Gibbons, 2009](#)).

Restrictive language socialization

One goal of academic language socialization is to enable newcomers to learn the language they need to participate actively in the cultural practices of schooling (Duff, 2010; Huang, 2004). Teacher-student talk can socialize students into culturally appropriate ways of using academic language—for both ideas and display. As the above data show, however, teachers' discursive moves can also unintentionally limit students' opportunities to take up academic language in their writing, thus restricting their participation in the academic community of school.

Teacher responses to students shaped what counted as appropriate writing practices in each classroom. The teachers' stated goal for their Transitions classes was to help their students write passing essays and avoid remediation. They did not consciously intend to socialize their students, but their discursive moves served to shape the culture of the classroom around writing. The students were being socialized to see academic language as something used for assessment purposes and to demonstrate mastery of a system where they depended on teachers for words to use in their essays. Literacy in this classroom, as in the classes analyzed by Enright et al. (2012), was not communication but a technical skill.

This socialization limited what students did in writing. While students in the Transitions classes used language for writing, and created passing texts, their interactions with the teachers did not address issues of the nature of academic language or how students could employ it on their own. The culture of these classrooms, therefore, was one of following directions, and also one of chance: lucky students (when teachers listened and waited) were heard and received focused help; unlucky students received inappropriate or incomprehensible feedback. Thus their participation in the academic discourse of the school remained at a surface level, replicating language given to them by the teachers. Unfortunately, these ways of valuing language are not congruent with the ways in which students need to be able to use language in mainstream or college classes (Enright, 2013, analyzes writing practices in mainstream classes).

Implications

These findings reinforce concerns about the silencing of immigrant multilingual students in US and Canadian contexts, where multicultural but locally raised students monopolized classroom talk (Duff, 2002; Talmy, 2008) and teacher practices limited multilingual students' oral participation and thus opportunities to learn academic language (Wiltse, 2006). Garnett (2012) notes that in Canada, the most successful immigrant multilingual students in high school were those who entered

Grade 9 already proficient in English. Students not yet proficient in English at that time were more likely to fail exams and drop out.

One implication for teaching is the need for attention to the intersection between oral and written language seen in these conferences. Paralleling Weissberg (2005), this study has shown how teacher-student talk supports students' written language use. The students best able to capitalize on the teachers' oral feedback were those who were given, or who took for themselves, more discursive opportunities, whereas students who passively accepted teacher commentary (or who allowed teacher interruptions) did not substantively change their essays. This suggests that multilingual students should learn cultural and linguistic ways to maintain conversations—participating actively, standing up for their ideas, and negotiating language with their teachers.

More importantly, however, teachers must recognize when students do not orient to scaffolding attempts and, when that recognition occurs, change their interactional patterns to help students learn academic language. The teachers did use scaffolding techniques such as modelling and designedly incomplete utterances (Koshik, 2002), but gave students language without helping them learn to use that language autonomously. Both teachers wanted to help students pass required assessments, which rewarded students' effective imitation of academic language rather than a deep understanding thereof. Teachers need to understand how the quality of their interactions affects multilingual students' language development. Although teachers do have limited time, this study and previous research (Freedman, et al., 2005; Kibler, 2011) have shown that quick check-ins allow for meaningful interaction, provided both teacher and student orient to each other's discourse through simple moves such as pausing or checking for comprehension. Future research must address how teachers can become mindful of their interactions with multilingual students to foster practices that scaffold rather than restrict opportunities to develop academic language through writing.

Research on high school second language writing continues to be a priority. We need more investigation of students' language socialization and writing development before university. Students at the high school level have different goals, different immigration histories, and different identity and learning trajectories. We must therefore ensure teachers are better prepared to support language and writing instruction for multilingual adolescents.

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Notes

- 1 California uses *English learner* to mean “students who do not speak, read, write, or understand English well” (California Department of Education, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/>). Although the school considers the focal students in this study to be English learners, not all of those students self-identify as such. The label ignores their fluency in other languages and the English (in multiple dialects and registers) they already speak. Therefore, I call students *multilingual* when addressing their language backgrounds, because they all are.
- 2 Names of people and places have been changed. Focal students chose their own pseudonyms.
- 3 California uses the terms *Hispanic* and *White (non-Hispanic)* in reporting school demographics. “Fluent English Proficient” is the state’s label for English-speaking students who speak a language other than English at home or whose status changed from English Learner earlier in their schooling.
- 4 *Contextualization cues* are context-embedded, “verbal, nonverbal, and prosodic signals” that convey meaning to the participants (Bloome et al., 2005, p. 9).
- 5 *Tracers* are topics discussed during interaction and later incorporated into students’ revised writing (Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997).
- 6 Quotations are included with fidelity to the speaker/writer’s original.

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Appendix: Transcription Key

//xxxx// Overlapping talk (aligned at onset)

x::x Sound stretch

CAPITALS Emphasis or louder volume

xxx? Question tone (rise)

xxx, Low rise (pause)

xxx. Low fall (pause at end of utterance)

[#] Pause (in seconds)

“xxx” Reading from a text (own or other’s)

xxx Composing text orally

[unint] Unintelligible speech

[xxx] Non-verbal activity